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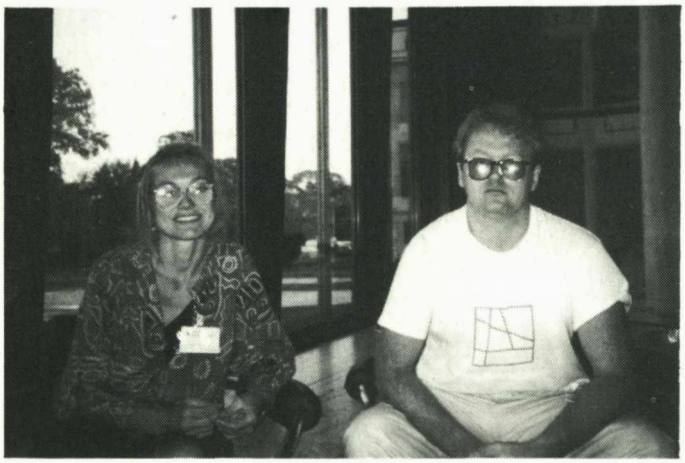
This East Timor supplement to *TAPOL Bulletin*, No 95, October 1989, is published by TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, 111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR4 8HW, UK. Tel: 01-771 2904.

East Timor, the inside story

Two tourists from Sweden, Jan-Erik Forsberg and Eva Vanglund, armed with cameras and tape-recorders, decided during a trip to Indonesia to make a ten-day visit to East Timor in May this year. Taking full advantage of the chance for tourists to go to East Timor under Jakarta's policy of 'openness', they travelled to the eastern part of the country, only to discover, as Forsberg said in a statement to the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights three months later, that East Timor is "a country at war and a nation still living under foreign occupation".



Eva Vanglund and Jan-Erik Forsberg at the UN to lobby the Sub-Commission about East Timor. [Photo: Carmel Budiardjo. The other photos are by Jan-Erik Forsberg.]

Permit

The permit they received in Jakarta mentioned only Dili and they were given names of places in the east that they would not be allowed to visit, including Natarbora, Los Palos, Baucau and Viqueque. In Dili, the police seemed unaware of this and did not prevent them from taking the bus to Baucau after several days in the capital. In Baucau, they found that they were also able to travel on to Viqueque. This suggests that some authorities in East Timor are less concerned than others to limit access to the more sensitive areas of the country.

In Dili, they stayed at Hotel Dili, avoiding the Tourismo and Resende hotels which are bristling with security agents. Even so, they received daily visits from immigration and tourism officials. They were able to shake off attempts to organise their itinerary but other hotel guests received a visit from someone called William Blake who said he works for Sospol; he invited them to dinner and bought them bus tickets. 'Sospol' is the social and political section in all government offices always headed by army intelligence agents and responsible for security matters (basically, the political commissar).

A different Dili

Regarding their stay in Dili, Forsberg told the UN Sub-Commission:

Our first impressions seemed to confirm the picture painted by the authorities. We had been told that East Timor was now peaceful, safe and developing. In Dili we saw new buildings, a modern sports arena and well-kept streets. But we also found a different Dili where (Timorese) live in poverty in huts and shacks on the other side of a dried-up river. We talked with people there and with students from the San Jose school and asked, was there any resistance and what they thought about integration. Our questions were met with both sympathy and fear... 'I understand why you are asking buy I can't say anything.'

When they took the bus to Baucau, the identity cards of all Timorese passengers had to be handed over to a conductor. Each time the bus stopped at security checkpoints, three times from Baucau and three times from Baucau to Viqueque, the conductor reported to the post and all cards were checked.

As they neared Baucau, the army's presence became more conspicuous. At Laleia heavily-armed soldiers were repairing a bridge destroyed only three years ago; four were on guard while two worked.

As for Baucau, it "looked like a city at war". At the airport, they saw armoured personnel carriers, helicopters and heavily-armed soldiers in combat uniform. Indeed, as Forsberg later told TAPOL, virtually all the soldiers they saw were carrying automatic weapons and wearing combat fatigue. The only place to stay was Flamboyant Hotel, which for years has been used by the paras regiment as an

A security checkpoint outside Dili. Forsberg took this photo from inside the bus taking them to Baucau.

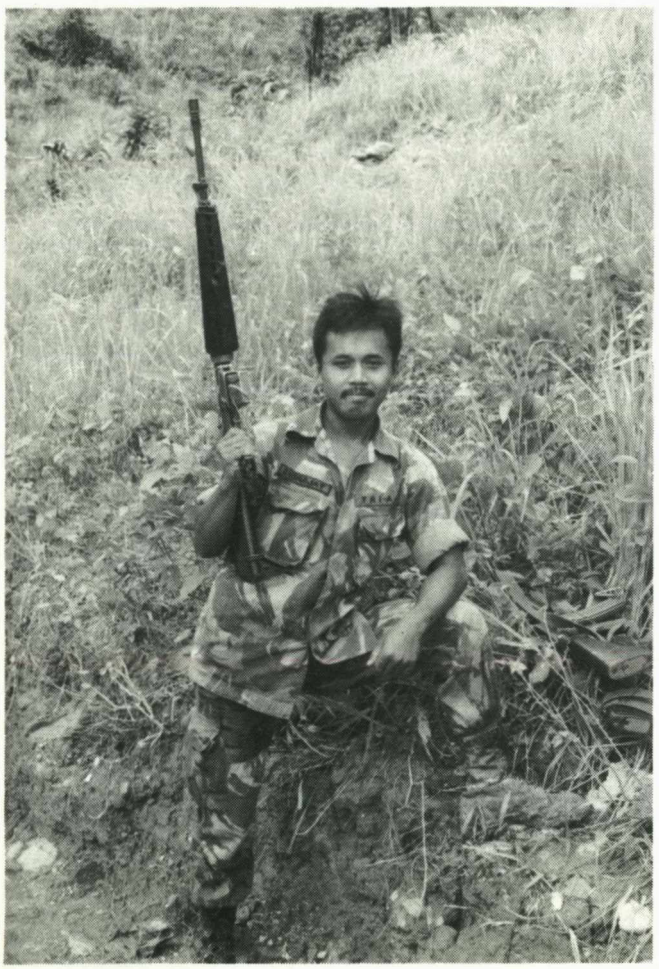
interrogation and torture centre. It is now being refurbished for use as a hotel again. [The Swedes later learnt that the interrogation centre in Baucau has now been shifted to somewhere near the airfield.]

What struck the travellers on their way from Baucau to Viqueque was the huge tracts of land that are devoid of population and uncultivated. This was formerly an important rice-growing region.

Their stay in Viqueque coincided with the Muslim holiday, Idul Fitri, and a visit by armed forces commander-in-chief, General Try Soetrisno. Taking Forsberg for a visiting journalist, the general shook hands with him and allowed him to take close-ups. "School-children had been mobilised to greet him but there were very few adults and they didn't seem to share the excitement of the children," Forsberg later told the UN Sub-Commission.

Military operations

Viqueque, they discovered, is a city surrounded by armed resistance fighters with troops constantly on the move. When they asked about the massive military



On the road to Liuhunu. An Indonesian soldier proudly poses with his weapon, as he guards others at work.

presence, they were told the troops were needed for development. "In the evenings however [they spent four nights in Viqueque], we heard grenade-shelling from the surrounding hills and in the mornings we saw trucks returning full of soldiers who were covered in mud."

In discussion with Timorese and Indonesians, civilian and military, they pieced together invaluable information about local, on-going military operations.

While Fretilin fighters are believed to be organised in five units, each of two companies, or about 500 people, the Indonesian army has three or four battalions in the city (more than 3,000 men) plus a reconnaissance unit of Timorese called Team Makatit, or the Hawk Team, whose commander is known as Lafargue or The Crocodile. Besides combat battalions and a battalion of territorial troops, there are para-commandos, Timorese civil defence troops (hansip) and a Timorese army unit, Battalion 744. In other words, Indonesian troops outnumber resistance fighters by at least six to one. One informant told Forsberg that the Fretilin arm themselves by ambushing army units, killing the troops and running off with their weapons. The hansips carry inferior weapons as they are suspected of pro-Fretilin sentiments with a disposition to defect, taking their weapons with them.

With Fretilin forces on the outskirts, the city is ringed by military posts, making a huge circle to defend the city from Fretilin attacks. Local civilian inhabitants (not hansips) are required to remain on guard at these posts nightly; they each must do guard-duty for seven consecutive nights while the soldiers sleep, ready for combat on the following day.

A similar situation exists in nearby Lakluta where, as Forsberg was told, two men on guard-duty were shot dead last October.

Returning to Dili from Viqueque, Forsberg and Vanglund spent one night at the police station in Ossu. One wall was covered by a huge board with statistics showing how people voted at the 1987 elections, the property and cattle they owned, the regional voting patterns, and so on.

Fretilin-held territory

According to several of their sources, Fretilin forces have launched a number of attacks recently. In July 1987, they attacked Viqueque, Meli-Meloi, killing two soldiers and destroying several houses. In December 1987, they attacked Monumento, south of Viqueque, burning down houses and capturing food, while in late 1988 and early this year, they mounted several attacks on Uaimur, north of Viqueque.

Although as Forsberg discovered, many people in Viqueque have close relatives fighting in the bush, they never dare to express support for the resistance, for fear of being arrested or worse.

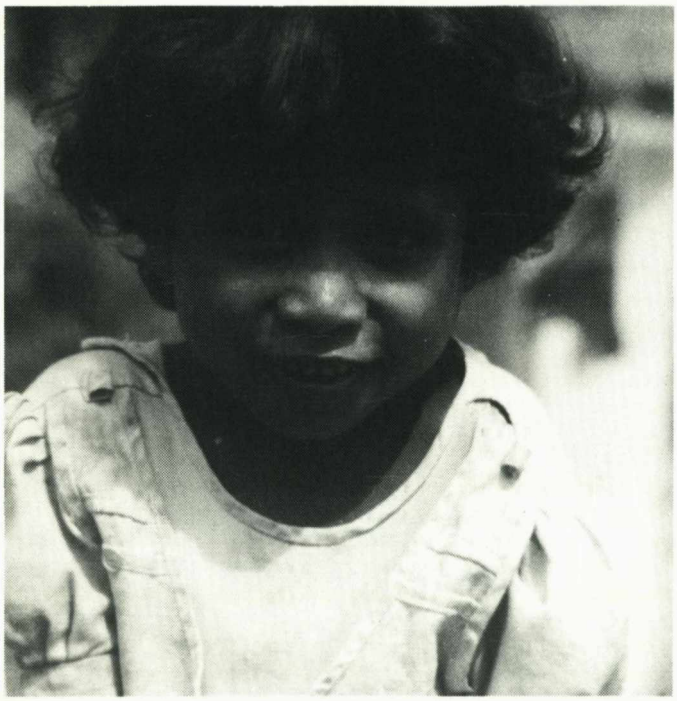
According to several well-informed contacts, Fretilin forces control the surrounding mountains and forests, turning these into areas which the Indonesian troops are not able to penetrate. While most civilians are confined to army-supervised villages, there are also civilians in the interior with the resistance.

Concentration camps for villages

Villagers in the district, Forsberg was told, continue to live in concentration camps and are prevented from going more than five kilometres beyond the camp perimeter. Violators are suspected of making contact with the resistance since the army is convinced that these areas are under Fretilin control.

Marina super-market in Dili, an outlet for the army-run company, PT Denok.

"Here, we are concentrated in Viqueque," said one informant. "There, over those mountains, there is no population, only Fretilin, according to the army. Anyone going more than 5 kms could, they suspect, be getting information from Fretilin or telling them how to attack Indonesian positions. Much of the land which is out-of-bounds is fertile and is not under cultivation, hence the shortage of food. Anyone wishing to go, say, to Bibiliao to plant or harvest crops must go in a group of ten to thirty people and return to Viqueque the same day."



Before setting out, the local military command (*kodim*) or NCO (*babinsa*) must inform the battalion commander that a group will be going to gather food. They go under military escort with troops in front and in the rear. Only a month ago, Forsberg was told, two people were shot dead because they went out to gather food without permission.

Health conditions and the war

Forsberg also learnt about the very inadequate medical services facilities in Viqueque. Infant mortality is high because of the prevalence of tuberculosis and a high incidence of stomach disorders, as well as tropical diseases. Doctors are few and far between and as many as sixty localities in the district do not have a single nurse. The doctors who come to East Timor are young graduates with no experience and little interest in helping Timorese.

[Confirming this account with some alarming statistics of his own, Mario Carrascalao, the governor of East Timor, recently told a team of Indonesian MPs who visited Dili that 70 per cent of Timorese suffer from tuberculosis, while only forty out of the sixty-one sub-districts in East Timor have a doctor. (**Jakarta Post**, 5 August 1989)

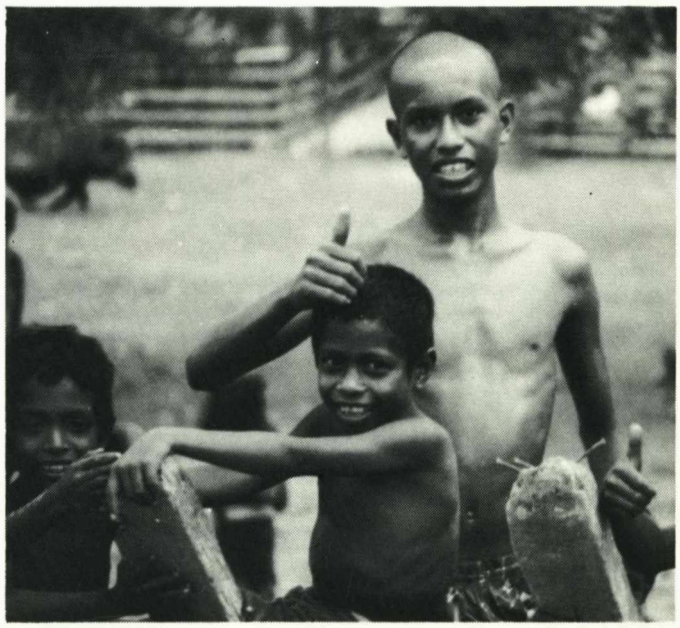
In areas where military operations are under way, there is an added obstacle to medical care, highlighted by an incident described to Forsberg in Viqueque. An army intelligence unit out on reconnaissance to discover Fretilin positions came across a stock of medicine and drew the conclusion that it had been supplied by nearby villagers. This led to house-to-house searches; anyone found to be in possession of medicines was arrested and taken to *kodim* for interrogation. Since then, nurses at the local health centre have been afraid to issue medicine to anyone, lest they are suspected of hoarding up medicines to send to the fighters in the bush.

Birth control

One constant bone of contention for the Timorese people is the government's family planning programme. The Swedish visitors were left in no doubt about the strong resistance to this programme, primarily, as they were told, on religious grounds. They learned that the people who are most vulnerable to pressure are Timorese military personnel and civil servants. "Their commanders and superiors are all Indonesians, mostly from Java and they have no-one to protect them against family-planning exhortations." Moreover, these people only receive child allowances for the first three children.

Discrimination and culture

Visiting localities like Baucau and Viqueque gave the Swedish tourists a unique insight into the education system and cultural discrimination. First, they were told by people connected with local schools that although almost all teachers in the primary schools



are Timorese and hence Tetum speakers, they must do all their teaching in Indonesian. Tetum may not be used or spoken at school. Army officials frequently visit the schools to make sure that everyone speaks Indonesian. This is part of what they proudly boast of as their "social-political role". At lower and upper secondary schools, most teachers are Indonesian.

Besides language teaching, history is the subject most directed towards making school-children 'think like Indonesians'. The two Swedes saw school walls adorned with pictures of Indonesian leaders and were told that the history curriculum is called **Pelajaran Sejarah Perjuangan Bangsa** or the History of the National Struggle (Indonesian, not Timorese).

The one place where Tetum may officially be used is in church. The Vatican has authorised a Tetum version of the mass and it is now widely celebrated in that language. [No agreement was reached, however, over a proposal that the Pope celebrate mass in Tetum when he makes his three-hour visit to East Timor on 12 October. He may therefore say it in Latin with a translation into Indonesian.] Timorese priests who are occasionally invited to celebrate mass in Indonesian find that few Timorese come to their services.

There are not enough secondary schools to absorb children who complete primary education. Nearly 1,400 children will be finishing their primary school education this year in Viqueque but there are only 7 schools to absorb them. (A reasonable calculation might be a total of forty new entrants per school.) Moreover, most of the available places will be taken by Indonesian children. There are far more secondary schools in Dili but here too, Indonesian children are

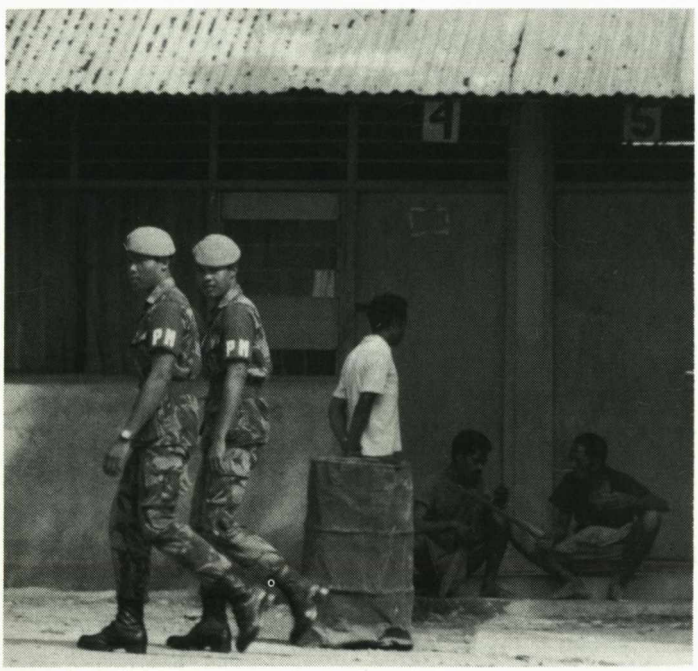
assured places while Timorese children are not. Various methods are used to swing entry in favour of Indonesian children. Most discriminatory of all is the fact that school reports and grades are not enough; children are required to sit entry tests, in Indonesian, to the detriment of Timorese children.

"Army strikes fear", says journalist

Freelancer Danny Gittings wrote, after a week's visit to East Timor in June, that "fear and tension are still widely apparent in this troubled tropical enclave".

Visitors to... Dili now see a pleasant, well-ordered town, apparently untouched by fighting, where the availability of western consumer goods gives a hint of newly-found prosperity. However two-thirds of East Timor is located east of Dili and a week-long journey through these areas on local buses produced a very different picture of life in the enclave. The military presence rapidly became more apparent.

In Los Palos, he was warned not to travel out of town after dark because of guerrilla activity. It was

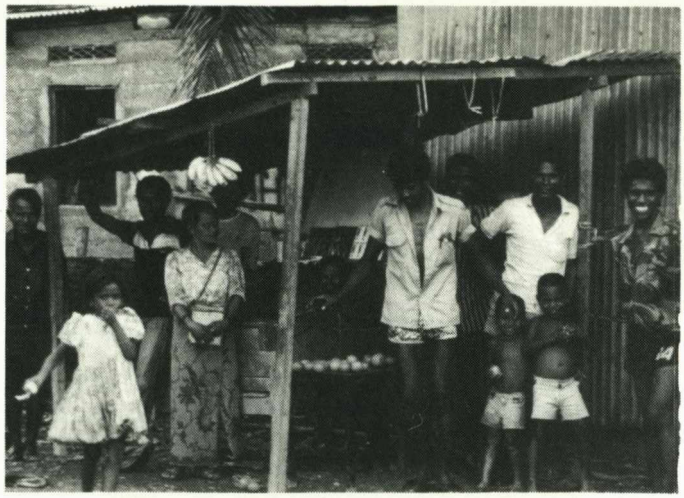


A typical sight in Baucau, where soldiers in military fatigues are everywhere to be seen.

difficult to find anyone to drive him farther east to Tutuila because the region was regarded as dangerous. When someone did agree, he posted a look-out on the roof to watch for guerrillas.

Like many villages in the remoter areas of East Timor, today's Tutuila is a modern settlement built on high ground - in this case seaside cliffs - as part of a government resettlement scheme to isolate the locals from the rebels. A villager said they were forcibly evicted from its former site... in 1982 and those who refused to move were killed. Amid the ruins of the old Tutuila, only gravestones could still be seen standing, a sight almost as common as houses in this part of the enclave, and a sombre reminder of the huge number of victims during the 14-year conflict.

A young man he met in a restaurant loudly extolled the benefits Indonesian rule had brought. "But later, in a deserted barn away from prying eyes, the same Timorese worker added a ... cautionary footnote: 'Indonesia has brought us many good things but we are all still afraid of her army." ["Army still strikes fear in villages", *South China Morning Post*, 12 August 1989.]



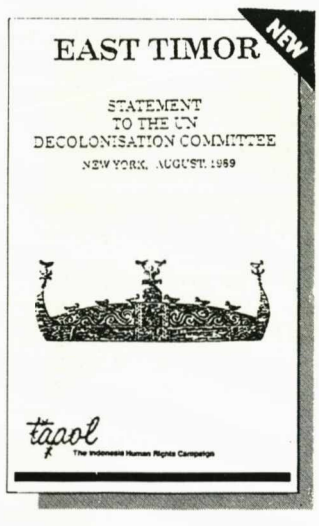
A wayside stall on the way to Area Branca, Dili. Here, says Forsberg, the people greet you in Portuguese.

In another article, Gittings said there are still an estimated 10,000 Indonesian troops stationed in East Timor.

Their presence is all pervasive. The military dominates the local economy and frequent army checkpoints are strung all along the main roads. Signs of war can be seen almost everywhere. In some areas, patrols of wary soldiers were to be seen moving slowly in the bush, their guns at the ready. Indonesian civilians appeared uneasy travelling in East Timor, often advising against travel after dark.

A minibus full of villagers and lively teenage girls fell suddenly silent when a soldier, dressed in combat fatigues and clutching his rifle, climbed aboard. Several people said they were worried about being interrogated by military intelligence simply for talking to a foreigner.

Gittings also met deputy governor, Lieutenant-Colonel A.B. Saridjo (who has a long career of military and civilian jobs in East Timor), who confirmed that villagers are still being re-settled away from areas of guerrilla activity "to provide better security for them". ["No end to a long-hidden suffering", in *The Scotsman*, 28 August]*



Occasional Reports no. 11 contains TAPOL's submission to the 1989 meeting of the UN Decolonisation Committee, focusses on the militarised structure of the Indonesian administration in East Timor and the truth about the 'opening up' of East Timor.

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